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Author(s): Lic. Luis Cabrera

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## THE MEXICAN SITUATION FROM A MEXICAN POINT OF VIEW

*By Lic. Luis Cabrera, recently Speaker of the House of Representatives in the Mexican Congress*

Much has been said in the United States about the Mexican situation, but actual conditions in Mexico have never been fully understood, because they have always been studied from an American point of view.

The sources from which Americans draw their information about Mexico are chiefly foreign residents and investors, who are very apt to consider the Mexican situation only from the standpoint of their own interests. All that foreigners seek in Mexico is the reestablishment of a state of things favoring the continuation and promotion of business. They generally believe that the conditions of Mexicans themselves, and of those issues which are of a purely national character, do not concern them, and consequently they do not regard them as necessary factors in the problem, such as they understand it. Hence, the proposing of solutions which, although beneficial perhaps to foreign interests, do not tend to solve the Mexican problem itself.

To fully understand the Mexican situation and to find satisfactory solutions both to Mexican and foreign interests, it is necessary to study the question from a Mexican point of view.

Such is the purpose of this paper.

Foreigners in Mexico believe that the only political problem which interests them is peace. But misled by superficial judgment or pushed by impatience, they have believed that the establishment of peace in Mexico depends only on the energy with which the country is governed.

All foreigners in Mexico look for a strong government, an iron hand or iron fist, and the only thing they discuss is whether a certain man is sufficiently strong or energetic to govern the country. And when they find a man with such qualities, foreigners always have believed that it was their duty to help that man to come into power and to support him.

These were the reasons for the foreign sympathy in favor of General Reyes first, General Félix Díaz afterwards, and General Huerta, and these are the reasons why President Madero did not get the full support of foreigners. He was considered a weak man, and consequently unable to establish peace.

It is necessary to rectify foreign opinion about strong governments in Mexico.

A strong government is not the one able to maintain peace by the mere force of arms, but the one which can obtain the support of the majority of the country. Any peace obtained by the system of the iron fist is only a temporary peace. Permanent peace in Mexico must be based on certain economic, political and social conditions which would produce a stable equilibrium between the higher and the lower classes of the nation.

Foreigners ought to be persuaded that to have real guarantees for their interests it is necessary that such interests be based on the welfare of the people of Mexico.

It is then to the interest of foreign capitalists to help Mexicans to obtain such conditions as will produce permanent peace in Mexico.

The troubles in Mexico during the last three years are attributable to mal-administration covering a period of thirty years. The internal upheaval in Mexico could not have grown to the importance that it has reached, had it only had the object of satisfying personal ambitions. The revolution in Mexico could not be so strong as it is, were robbery the only purpose of the soldiers or was personal ambition the only motive of the leaders.

The truth is that the Mexican disturbances are a real revolution of apparently political aspect, but at the very

bottom of economic and social tendencies. The present revolution in Mexico is only the continuation of a revolution begun in 1910.

The present revolution's main purposes are to free the lower classes from the condition of slavery in which they have been for a long time and to seek for an improvement in their economic and social conditions.

In Mexico there is no real middle class. The purpose of the present revolution is the creation of such a class which may help the country to have a social equilibrium. There is no real social equilibrium and there is no peace, and there is no democratic form of government without a middle class.

The causes of the Mexican revolution and its aims, are of a social, economic and political character. Consequently the Mexican question presents three different aspects, intimately related to each other, that can be called the social, economic and political aspects of the Mexican question.

#### SOCIAL ASPECT

Mexico has a population of about 15,000,000 inhabitants, 15 per cent of which are Indians, 75 per cent mixed or "mestizos" and 10 per cent of European descent. Each one of these groups presents different characteristics and even the "mestizos" cannot be said to be homogeneous, since there are various racial types among them.

Mexico, however, has *no real race problem*. Properly speaking, there are no insoluble conflicts between the various elements of the nation, because the Indians are easily assimilated by the "mestizos," and as a matter of fact, when the Indians receive education or mix with the "mestizos," they immediately become identified with them. A full blooded Indian who has received a certain amount of education, is always sure to keep it, and he never shows any retrogressive tendencies, so that we can say that *the effects of education upon the native Indians of Mexico are of a permanent character*.

On the other hand, the mestizo element of the population of Mexico intermarry very easily with the Europeans,

particularly with the Spaniards and French, and as soon as they have received a proper education or have acquired some economic welfare, they can be considered on practically the same level as any of the European residents.

But true as it is that this variety of races cannot be regarded as a social problem for Mexico, the large diversity of types of civilization found among those races, on the other hand, do give rise to grave difficulties, from the point of view of the government of the country.

The problem that every administration has to face in Mexico, that is to say, the social problem in its broadest sense, is to find a rule or a formula of government which shall be suitable to all the dissimilar elements of the population, or to find the various co-existing formulæ of government suitable to each one of the various groups of population. It is very difficult indeed to find a formula of government suitable at the same time to a fifteenth century type of civilization (Indians); to an eighteenth century type (largest part of the mixed races); to a nineteenth century type of civilization (educated mestizos) and to a twentieth century type (foreigners and Mexicans of high culture).

The systems used up to the present to govern these dissimilar groups have failed, that of General Diaz pretending to rule the country with sixteenth century proceedings, as well as that of Madero pretending to rule on a nineteenth century system. This social problem is intimately related to the political problem of the unfitness of the laws of Mexico.

The political problem of ruling over the different races in Mexico could have more or less adequate solutions, but the social problem has but one solution, namely: education.

Fortunately, the characteristics of the Indian and mixed races, and their facility to assimilate into the white race, give sufficient grounds to believe that the problem can easily be solved simply by means of an educational policy wisely matured and persistently applied.

It can be safely said that in fifty years from now, if the education of the Indians is kept up, all local dialects will die away and the whole Indian population will be assimilated by the mixed race.

## ECONOMIC ASPECT

The principal causes of the revolution in Mexico are undoubtedly of an economic, and chiefly of an agrarian character.

The colonial policies followed by Spaniards, when they conquered Mexico, consisted in taking possession of the greatest part of the lands of New Spain to grant them to the Spanish conquerors. Extensive land concessions were granted now in favor of the church, now in favor of the Spanish soldiers, leaders, chieftains, or mere settlers.

Together with each one of those large concessions granted in favor of Spaniards, a large number of Indians were also assigned to them with the apparent object of educating and Christianizing them, but with the real purpose of obtaining slaves, or land serfs, to cultivate and develop the lands granted.

With regard to the Indian towns already existing at the time of the conquest, they were theoretically respected together with their lands. New towns were also laid out as Indian reservations, providing them with sufficient lands which were called "egidos" and "propios," for the common use of all the inhabitants.

The colonial policies of Spain resulted therefore in the formation of a wealthy class of landholders as against the Indian population, which found itself either assigned to the estates as land serfs or concentrated in Indian towns.

In 1810 the freedom of slaves and Indians was officially decreed by Hidalgo, but the independence of Mexico having been accomplished by the wealthy landholders, the situation of the Indians was not materially changed, and the lower classes still remained in a state of actual servitude, although, theoretically, slavery had been already abolished.

We can safely say that up to 1856 the only real-estate property of any importance, which was not in the hands of the Spanish great landholders, was the property of the church and the "commons" of the Indian towns.

The church had been acquiring large territorial property

obtained either by direct concessions from the Government or by donations and foundations from private sources.

The towns still were owning their communal lands granted to them, as stated above, for the purpose of grazing, timbering, farming and watering, and which were called "egidos." The characteristic aspect of the agrarian questions in Mexico was for nearly two centuries, the obstinate defense made by the towns against the great landholders who always tried to invade the communal lands.

From 1856 to 1859 certain laws were enacted in order to do away with the mainmort. About the middle of 1859, the liberal administration of Juarez, for political reasons, was compelled to deprive the church of its properties and to begin to appropriate them to private individuals, who wished to acquire them at low prices.

Towards 1859 also, and as a consequence of the laws enacted to do away with the mainmort, the "egidos" of the towns began to be divided up and apportioned in small parcels among the inhabitants, for the purpose of creating small agricultural properties, but through ignorance and lack of means, those lands were almost immediately resold to the great landholders whose properties were adjacent to the "egidos."

About 1876, at the beginning of the "porfirista" regime, (the administration of General Porfirio Diaz) the real property of the church had already passed into the hands of private individuals, and the communal property of the towns was beginning to be divided among the masses.

There still remain, however, *large estates owned by old wealthy families of Spanish origin*, which could be considered as real mainmort, and which are now responsible for the present agrarian conflict.

The "porfirista" regime can be defined by saying that it consisted in putting the power in the hands of the large landholders, thus creating a feudal system.

The local governments of the different states in Mexico and nearly all the important public offices, were almost always in the hands of, or controlled by, wealthy families owning large tracts of land, which of course were inclined to

extend protection to all properties such as theirs. Torres and Izábal in Sonora, Terrazas in Chihuahua, Garza Galán in Coahuila, Redo in Sinaloa, Obregons in Guanajuato, the Escandons in Morelos, etc., are instances of great landholders who always had an absolute control over the government of their respective states.

The political, social and economic influence exerted by landholders during General Diaz's administration, was so considerable and so advantageous to them, that it hampered the development of the small agricultural property, which could have otherwise been formed from the division of ecclesiastical and communal lands.

The large estates called haciendas, pay only about 10 per cent of the taxes levied by law as result of misrepresenting the value of the property, while the small landholder is obliged to pay the whole tax imposed as he is unable to successfully misrepresent the value of his small holdings and as he lacks the political influence to obtain reductions.

The result of this system of inequitable taxation has been the gradual disappearance of small holdings which were absorbed by the large estates. This system was continued all through General Diaz's administration, thus increasing the power of the great landholders, and accentuating the contrast between the higher and the lower classes.

The communal lands or "egidos," used to be a means to ease to a certain extent the conditions in which the small agriculturalists found themselves, by affording them the opportunity of increasing their income out of what they could get from the use of the "commons."

But the condition of actual servitude in which the peon had always been, was accentuated and aggravated when the "egidos" disappeared, because, on the one hand, he was no more in a position to resort to the products of those communal lands, and on the other hand the great influence of the landholders was used as a political means to make peons work on the haciendas and keep them in an actual state of slavery.

The largest part of the inhabitants of towns where "egidos" have disappeared, being necessarily compelled to live on



the wages they get from working on the farms, and these wages being not enough to cover their expenses, it has become a common practice to advance money to the peons as a loan on account of future wages.

This system of lending the peons small amounts of money has resulted in accumulating huge debts on their shoulders. These debts were used as a pretext to keep the peons always at the service of the landowners, and the peon himself has been under the impression that he was legally bound to remain on the farm as long as he had not paid up his debts. These debts, as a rule, were transferred from father to son, thus creating in the rural population of the farm not only an actual condition of slavery, but the moral conviction among the peons themselves, that peonage was a necessary evil which the laws authorized.

This belief persisted through the ignorance of the peons themselves, and through the fact that the clergy has morally contributed to keep up the system.

During the first fifteen years of the administration of General Diaz, and when he was still strong enough to maintain his dictatorial rule, there was no apparent dissatisfaction among the rural classes, but later it became necessary to use drastic measures to keep the peons on the farms.

The large number of men who were deported from the more thickly populated regions, such as Mexico, Puebla, Toluca, etc., to the southern states, as well as the transportation by force of a large number of Yaqui Indian families from the state of Sonora to work as peons in Yucatan, are good examples of the use of public force to provide laborers for the "hacienda" and to maintain the condition of servitude of the rural classes in Mexico.

Since 1880 conditions in Mexico began to be complicated by reason of the policies of General Porfirio Diaz for the development of the country. General Diaz thought that the best way to develop the resources of Mexico was to favor the establishment of large business enterprises and the formation of large corporations to which special advantages were offered.

General Porfirio Diaz granted large concessions in lands,

mines, railroads, industrial and banking institutions to foreign investors, thus creating enormous monopolies and making more accentuated the contrast between the rich and the laboring classes of the nation. The cost of living was raised by the increasing of capital. The wages of miners, railroad men and those of the industrial classes were somewhat increased, although not in proportion to the increased high cost of living. The wages of the rural laborer did not enjoy this increase, the salary of the peon still remaining at a ridiculously low average. Notwithstanding the low rate of agricultural wages, the great land owners were still able to obtain labor thanks to their political influence which allowed them to keep the peons anyhow.

During General Diaz's administration, therefore, efforts were never made for the formation of a middle class. On the contrary, the power of the wealthy classes increased considerably, and a new privileged class arose from the great railroad, mining, banking and industrial concessionaires. The condition of the lower classes, on the other hand, was excessively precarious, and lately it became so grave, that during the last days of General Diaz's régime it is safe to say that the slavery of the peons was the principal cause of the unrest spreading throughout the country, and General Diaz had to resort very frequently to the use of force to maintain peace.

#### POLITICAL ASPECT

The economic unrest felt in Mexico during the last years of General Diaz's administration, had for its principal causes those which have already been enumerated, but this economic unrest was aggravated by political conditions.

The political problem is very complex, but it can be outlined or summed up as follows.

No constitutional system, properly speaking, can be said to have existed in Mexico prior to 1857. Towards 1857 the Constitution was adopted, but it was patterned largely on the French and American Constitutions, without taking into consideration the special conditions of Mexico.

The Constitution adopted in 1857 has been theoretically

in force ever since, but as a matter of fact it has never been applied on account of the Reform War, the French intervention, and the very abnormal conditions in which the country found itself during the administration of Juarez and Lerdo.

General Diaz entirely abandoned the Constitution of 1857 to follow a dictatorial regime.

In its political provisions the Constitution was never applied during General Diaz's administration. Elections of governors, local legislatures, congress, supreme court, etc., never took place, General Diaz himself making all the appointments.

Mexicans never had, therefore, the opportunity to test their Constitution, nor to see how it worked, and to find out whether it was suitable for the conditions of the country or not.

As regards justice, liberties and constitutional guarantees, the Constitution was never enforced for Mexicans, except in the cases where General Diaz thought it convenient. Only the wealthier classes could enjoy those liberties, they having sufficient influence to exact them from the President or from the supreme court.

Foreigners, also, by reason of their influence or through diplomatic pressure, have always been granted those liberties and guarantees recognized by the Constitution. These discretionary and unequal applications of the Constitution as regards individual guarantees, largely contributed to accentuate the difference already existing between the privileged classes and the masses.

The Constitution of 1857 undoubtedly presents a great number of points which make it absolutely unfit for the country.

The lack of municipal government, the unreasonable and arbitrary division of the country into so many states, the system of election of judges, the universal suffrage and even the system adopted for the substitution of the chief executive, and many other inadequate provisions, lead to the necessity of a general and fundamental revision of the Mexican Constitution.

The administration of General Diaz can then be summed up by saying that *it was a dictatorial regime with exceptions in favor of the wealthy classes and foreigners*. As a matter of fact, these exceptions were practically privileges, since 90 per cent of the population of the country did not enjoy either justice, or liberties, or guarantees.

From the political point of view, the administration of General Diaz, produced the same results as was produced from an economic point of view. *It deepened the division already existing between the higher and the lower classes*.

Any party wishing to establish peace in Mexico must take in consideration these three aspects of the Mexican situation. The Constitutionalist party wishes to solve the social problem of Mexico by fostering education so as to level the barriers between the upper and lower classes, as soon as possible. The Constitutionalist party wishes to improve the condition of the lower classes, so as to begin the creation of a middle class. In political matters the Constitutionalist party wishes the government of Mexico to abide by the Constitution, but at the same time wishes it to be so reformed as to meet the needs of the country.

Since 1895 there has been a feeling of unrest in Mexico which made itself more apparent during the last years of General Diaz's government. This feeling of restlessness was not well defined, and even when it led to several armed movements after 1905, it was generally thought that they were only insurrections of a local character or mere riots. When in 1908 General Diaz announced in the famous Creelman interview that he was ready to retire, public opinion in Mexico was profoundly stirred. Opposite tendencies appeared; one instigated by the friends of General Diaz, which demanded his reëlection or the election of a man who would continue his policies, and the other which wished a change in the government and in the system.

It was at that time that don Francisco I. Madero organized the anti-reëlection party, and that he began his electoral campaign under the motto "effective voting and no-re-election." It was supposed that the best remedy for the Mexican situation would be a free election of a president,

and the establishment in the political laws of the principle of one term. The political problem seemed to be the most important of all questions, and it absorbed entirely the public's attention so that the economic and social problems were lost sight of.

General Diaz accepted very easily his last reëlection, and permitted to be named with him, as vice-president, Ramón Corral, who represented the perpetuation of the Diaz régime. No other candidates than Diaz and Corral were admitted. Madero was arrested before the elections, and the triumph of the Diaz-Corral ticket made it apparent that it was impossible to obtain a political change by ballot.

On his escape from prison, Francisco I. Madero started the revolution. The plan of San Luis Potosi, which was the basis of the movement, made it clear that the leaders still considered as the chief problem of Mexico a political change, and the purpose of that plan was chiefly a change of government.

The rural classes, however, followed Madero, and supported him in the revolution initiated by him, under the tacit belief that his revolution would bring some agrarian reforms which were needed to improve the condition of the masses, but which were not yet enunciated in any concrete form.

General Diaz believed that he would stop the revolution by his retiring from power. The negotiations at Juarez, by which General Diaz agreed to retire and to deliver the government to a provisional president, checked the revolution precisely when it began to acquire its actual strength and real form.

De la Barra, a vacillating and Jesuitic character, had no formative policy during his administration. As a creature of General Diaz, intimately connected with the conservative element of the old régime, he merely limited himself to muster out the revolutionary army, as the way in which he understood peace ought to be reëstablished.

By this negative action he minimized the effect of the revolution and he prepared a reaction in favor of the old régime. The same men who surrounded General Diaz and who had urged the continuation of his policies, returned to

the country when they saw that they were not persecuted, and started a political campaign against Madero and against the revolution. It was during this period that efforts were made to concentrate the public opinion in favor of General Reyes and De la Barra himself as presidential candidates against Madero.

It was at this same time that the clerical party which since 1867 had shown no signs of life, was revived under the name of the Catholic party, and clearly showed that it favored the reactionary principles of the Diaz régime.

De la Barra's ad-interim administration can be summed up by saying that while he received the government in trust to be turned over to the revolution, he did everything in his power to keep it for himself and to avoid the advent of the new régime, thus showing disloyalty both to Madero personally, and to the revolution itself.

When Madero came into power in November, 1911, he found the government in such condition that he was unable to change its direction, and was forced to accept existing conditions and even the same cabinet appointed by De la Barra, in which the most influential part was played by Ministers Calero, Hernández and Ernesto Madero.

Surrounded by nearly all Diaz followers, Madero could not establish a reform policy. During all the time of his government, he was constantly called by two opposite tendencies: on one side the reactionary in favor of the Diaz régime, and on the other side the revolutionary.

Madero tried to make friends of the Diaz partisans but unsuccessfully. At the same time he lost the support of the greater part of the men who had helped him during the revolution.

At the very beginning of Madero's administration a protesting movement started, which was backed by some of the old régime. The insurrections of Pascual Orozco and of General Bernardo Reyes were no more than attempts of reaction against the 1910 revolution. The insurrection of Félix Diaz in the month of September, 1912, demonstrated that the reactionary sentiment had acquired a great importance, and that the army, which was the same army left by

General Porfirio Diaz, was not in sympathy with the revolution nor with Madero personally.

The uprising of the arsenal at Mexico City in the month of February, 1913, was the most vigorous reactionary movement of any started against Madero, and it gave General Huerta a chance to place himself at the head of the reaction.

General Huerta, who had been in the army since the time of General Diaz's administration, remained in it during the ad-interim administration of De la Barra, and later was under the orders of President Madero.

In the spring of 1912, Huerta had rendered President Madero very important services in overcoming the revolutionary movement started by Pascual Orozco in Chihuahua.

The prestige acquired by General Huerta after his campaign against Orozco, made him appear as one of the rising political figures in Mexico, in spite of his deficient culture, and his not very commendable personal habits. The enemies of Madero soon began to drop words of personal ambition in his ear, and finally succeeded in convincing him that he was the most prominent of the military officers and Madero's chief support in maintaining power.

When in the month of February General Félix Diaz captured the arsenal, Huerta, who was then the commander-in-chief of President Madero's troops, did not make, as a matter of fact, any serious effort to recapture the arsenal and overcome Félix Diaz. He had already realized that the fate of the government was in his hands, and during the tragic ten days of the bombardment of the city he kept a dubious attitude.

The fight, or rather the firing sustained by either side, was used by Félix Diaz's supporters as a moral pressure to bear on Madero to obtain his resignation. Various influences were resorted to for that purpose. Finally, the pressure brought to bear by the foreign residents and the diplomatic representatives, gave Huerta an excuse to attempt his coup, seemingly with the purpose of reestablishing peace through the arrest and deposition of Madero and Pino Suarez.

The principal rôle in this coup d'état, as regards the help



given by foreign residents and diplomats to the uprising of Félix Díaz and the subsequent overthrow of Madero by Huerta, was played by Mr. Henry Lane Wilson, American ambassador. He can be considered as the chief adviser of Huerta and Díaz, during the bombardment and, indeed, as the one really responsible for that coup d'état.

After Madero and Pino Suárez had been arrested, they were compelled to hand in their resignations. As provided by the Mexican Constitution, the secretary of foreign relations, Mr. Pedro Lascuráin, took charge of the executive power, but only for a few minutes, just long enough to appoint Huerta as secretary of the interior and to hand in his own resignation himself. By virtue of this resignation, Huerta was to assume the presidency at once.

The Mexican congress, acting under duress, and believing that the lives of the president and the vice-president would thus be spared, accepted their resignations, and endorsed the appointment of Huerta as president of the Republic.

The assassination of Madero and Pino Suárez was an act of a purely political character; it was discussed and approved by General Huerta and his cabinet<sup>1</sup> as the most expeditious way of removing all possible obstacles to the political success of the new administration. Huerta thought that by putting Madero and Pino Suárez out of the way he would remain practically without enemies. He was mistaken in thinking that Madero and Pino Suárez were the only obstacles that the new administration would have to overcome.

General Huerta's administration, both on account of its acts and of its men, was a thorough restoration of the dictatorial régime of General Díaz, with the only difference that the dictator was now Huerta, and that dictatorial measures and rigorous methods were carried to an extreme they had never reached before, not even in the most hazardous times of General Díaz's administration.

<sup>1</sup> The cabinet of General Huerta, which was appointed in accord with Félix Díaz, was: Francisco L. de la Barra, Alberto García Granados, Toribio Esquivel Obregón, Rodolfo Reyes, Manuel Mondragón, Alberto Robles Gil y Jorge Vera Estañol.



During Madero's government, the position of the revolutionary element was uncertain and awkward, because while they were supposed to be exercising a great political influence through Madero, practically they had no influence whatever since the Madero government was almost controlled by the conservative cabinet.

After the death of President Madero, the position of the revolutionary elements became clear. During his life, for reasons of loyalty and hope of a change, they had never taken an aggressive attitude, but once the president was dead and nothing to be hoped for from Huerta, there was no difficulty in renewing the struggle.

Huerta represented the reaction and his government was no more than the restoration of the government of General Diaz, with its same proceedings and the same men, under the orders of another chief.

The revolution against Huerta is nothing more than the revolution started in 1910 by Madero, and which having been checked in 1911 by virtue of the negotiations of Juarez and the election of Madero, now continued and entered into full activity, augmented because of the revolting circumstances under which the fall of Madero had taken place. The death of Madero has been one of the most powerful sentimental factors to increase the revolutionary movement against Huerta.

It has been very widely stated that the Carranza movement has only the purpose of avenging the death of Madero and reinstating the office-holders appointed by him. This is not the case. The purposes of the Constitutionals are higher and better defined than were the motives of the 1910 movement. The Constitutionals propose the reestablishment of a Constitutional government in Mexico, but as they realize the unfitness of the Mexican Constitution and other laws, they intend to reform them in order to have a system fitted to the country.

There is no doubt that peace in Mexico cannot be established unless a complete change takes place in the government's personnel and in the systems and laws. This is the

reason that the Constitutionals appear too radical to those who would like to find a way of pacifying Mexico at once.

The Constitutionals mean to begin immediately such economic reforms and specially such agrarian reforms as are necessary to offer to the lower classes an opportunity of improving their conditions: division of large estates, equalization of taxation, and in places where it would be necessary, the reestablishment of the "egidos" or communal land system.